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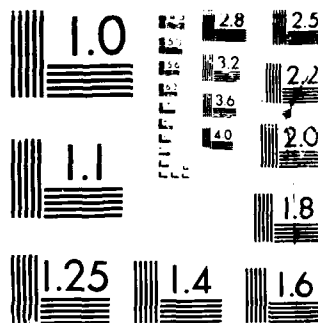
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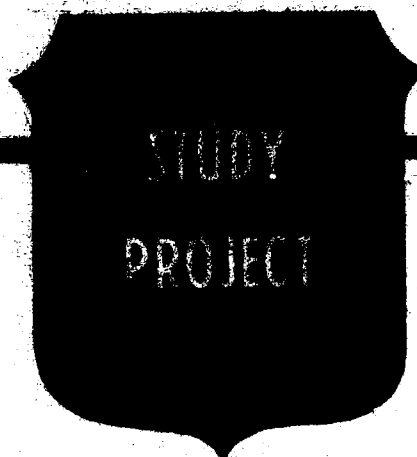
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THE QUESTION OF EXTERNAL CONTROL
OVER THE PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST PARTY INSURGENCY

BY

GARY D. KESSLER

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THE QUESTION OF EXTERNAL CONTROL
OVER THE PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST PARTY INSURGENCY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
28 March 1988

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ABSTRACT

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The Philippines is a centerpiece for U.S. political and forward deployment military strategies. As they relate to the Philippines, these strategies are currently being threatened, however, by a near revolutionary change in government in Manila, Soviet moves in the region, and a resurgence of the communist insurgency. This paper, wholly based on open-source material, focuses on the Philippine insurgency. A current priority U.S. policy concern is that this anti-American insurgency could seriously threaten U.S. interests in Asia and the Pacific by gaining control or significant influence in Manila. A concurrent U.S. concern is that either the Soviet Union or China, the major communist states, could translate material aid into significant control over the Philippine insurgency. This paper examines how susceptible the Philippine Communist Party (the CPP) and its military arm, the New Peoples Army (the NPA), are to control by either Moscow or Beijing through ideological or material support.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, a former American colony and host to the strategic Clark Air and Subic Bay Naval bases, is a centerpiece for U.S. political and forward deployment military strategies in the Pacific. In the 1980's, however, the U.S. position in the Philippines and the region as a whole has been seriously challenged. A left-leaning, weak government has replaced one that had been staunchly pro-American. The Soviet Union has moved to increase its political and military presence in the region. And the Philippine communist insurgency, which had been effectively crippled in the 1950's, has reemerged as a serious threat. This paper focuses on the Philippine insurgency. Specifically, it will examine how susceptible the Philippine Communist Party (the CPP) and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), are to external control from Moscow or Beijing through ideological or material support.

The study is wholly based on open-source material. Thus its scope is limited and its conclusions are tentative. Available evidence indicates the current Philippine insurgency is attempting to follow a traditional pattern of independent action free from external control. It also indicates Beijing fully supports the Manila government and U.S. military presence in the Philippines at the cost of any support for the

Philippine communists. The Soviets for their part appear to be hedging their bets by maintaining ties with both the government and the insurgents.

THE ORIGINAL COMMUNIST INSURGENCY AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Communism has a long history in the Philippines, but from the beginning the movement was largely self-generated and radically tailored to indigenous conditions and needs. It also was not controlled or significantly influenced from abroad. Communism was introduced as early as 1920, when Philippine labor leaders attended a Comintern-sponsored labor congress in Canton, China. The Comintern was then the international arm of the Soviet Communist Party. The original Philippine Communist Party, the PKP, was founded on 7 November 1930 with a Russian-style program. The urban and industrial base of the Russian Marxist-Leninist model, however, failed to meet the demands of the Philippine agrarian and village society and gave way to more indigenous concepts and procedures.¹ In 1938 the PKP merged with the Socialist Party, and the ideology of the combined party departed even further from the Soviet model. In 1942 the party organized the People's Anti-Japanese Army, the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (soon shortened to Huk), and led the armed resistance to the Japanese invasion. This move has served the party well in Filipino eyes ever since. Training centers were set up with help from military and political agents

sent from the Chinese communist movement, which also set up an active party faction among Manila's ethnic Chinese population. The PKP subsequently took to the agrarian-based tenets of the Maoist doctrine as being more relevant to the Philippines than Soviet doctrine.² One area specialist -- Brian Crozier in "The Rebels; A Study of Post-War Insurrections" -- claims that the early Philippine insurgency was directed by Moscow. He notes that the military phases of four communist insurgencies in the region -- in Malaya, Burma, and Indonesia as well as the Philippine Huk insurgency -- all started in 1948. And he claims that Moscow coordinated this timing.³ In contrast to Crozier's view, wartime PKP leader Luis Taruc wrote from prison that, while cadres of the party were trained in Moscow, there had been no real material support or direction from the Soviet party.⁴ The total honesty of disclaimers by an imprisoned party leader can be questioned. But the pattern of the PKP's independent approach to doctrine in its attempt to match its program to indigenous needs and the dearth of evidence of Soviet or Chinese material support to the Huks indicate it was largely self-generating and was not controlled from abroad.

THE NEW COMMUNIST INSURGENCY

Although it was severely crippled in the mid 1950's, the PKP did not die. The movement remained nearly invisible for two decades. Its party organs became nearly dormant, and its

members peacefully returned to civilian life under the grace period provisions of the Anti-Subversion Law. PKP leader Jose Lava changed the party structure by ending the cell-unit system and replacing it with an individual-link system activated by occasional "political transmissions" from the party center. Lava also brought the party closer to the Soviet ideological model. When martial law was declared in late 1972, Lava issued a political transmission stating martial law was not all bad because the main targets were "Maoists." He directed the party units to lie low and, if anything, help the government to ferret out these Maoists. By 1974 the PKP leadership had met with President Marcos, had declared support for the government, and had gained recognition of the PKP as a legal party.⁵

The "Maoists" Lava referred to constituted a new communist insurgency, which by 1985 eclipsed the PKP and was identified by the government as a reemergent and formidable threat. The new Communist Party of the Philippines (the CPP) was formed on 26 December 1968 based on Beijing's Maoist model and with the program of repudiating the PKP's conciliation policy.⁶ The party's military arm, the New People's Army (the NPA), was formed on 25 March 1969. By mid 1985 the CPP had established political organizations in over 20 percent of the country's 41,000 basic political units, the barangays. The CPP also exercised varying degrees of political influence over as much as 25 percent of the population.⁷ As early as December 1984 ANG BAYAN, the official CPP publication, had claimed a party and

NPA membership of 30,000 each.⁸ Official American estimates in 1986 placed NPA strength at 20,000, although Manila at the same time was only prepared to acknowledge a figure of 13,000.⁹ Even the lowest figure represented an impressive resurgence after dormancy for two decades.

The insurgency was now outstripping its ability to manage expansion. It was encountering military supplies problems. The pattern of NPA attacks changed in the spring of 1985, when it began smaller, platoon- and company-sized assaults on police stations and small military outposts, apparently to gain arms and ammunition.¹⁰ ANG BAYAN subsequently claimed the NPA doubled the number of arms it seized in 1985 over the previous year.¹¹ If the current insurgency is constrained by inadequate logistical support, several questions arise: What is the source of existing ideological and material support for the insurgency? What new sources of support can be tapped? And what degree of control is the CPP willing to give up to develop new support?

Internal Support

In addition to seizing arms and ammunition in military operations, the NPA has always been able to buy Philippine Army rifles and ammunition from individual soldiers. To raise funds it has also established a "revolutionary tax" in the areas it controls.¹² The real success of the expansion of the CPP in recent years, however, has largely resulted from its ability to develop support within the country's basic institutions.

The CPP has formed and gained the active support of two large political coalitions, the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), formed as a national anti-Marcos movement following the 1985 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino, and the illegal CPP-led National Democratic Front umbrella organization.¹³ The CPP has also penetrated labor organizations and recruited in the universities.¹⁴ The movement has even gained adherents and influence in the Catholic Church's midlevel social-action organizations, including such organizations as the Task Force on Detainees and the Basic Christian Communities as well as the Catholic relief services in the provinces.¹⁵ Just before the February 1986 election, Marcos charged that individual priests, practicing the theology of liberation, were giving guns and equipment to the NPA.¹⁶ The previous month Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile had claimed the NPA had also been successfully soliciting aid via the church from foreign church-based organizations.¹⁷

All has not been smooth sailing for the CPP in internal support over the last couple of years, however. The party made a major blunder by deciding to boycott the February 1986 election rather than supporting the populist opposition candidate, Corazon Aquino.¹⁸ Aquino swept into power in the wake of Marcos' precipitous departure from the Philippines and subsequently coopted much of the economic and social program the CPP had been promoting for years. Aquino did attempt to negotiate a cease-fire with the NPA and to include the CPP in

the programs of her government.¹⁹ But the CPP never gained leverage with Aquino after it failed to actively support her election bid. Eventually the new president reestablished a tough line towards the insurgency.²⁰

External Ideological Support

When the CPP was established, it enjoyed the ideological support of China. However, Beijing soon shifted toward the United States and ended its support for the insurgency. Both China's XINHUA News Agency and Radio Beijing had carried the first statement of the provisional CPP Politburo. This signaled Beijing's initial support for the insurgency.²¹ But Beijing subsequently became disturbed by Soviet-supported Vietnamese expansion into Cambodia and then began to court the Philippines and the other ASEAN members, which have mounted the most effective opposition to the Vietnamese program. By the mid 1970's all public vestiges of Chinese support for communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia -- once so strong that China hosted clandestine radios for the insurgencies in Thailand, Malaysia, and Burma -- had ended. Perhaps more infuriating to the CPP program was Beijing's decision to openly support the retention of U.S. military bases in the Philippines to counter Soviet advances in the Pacific.²² The last reported contact between China and the CPP occurred prior to Marcos' 1974 official China visit and the establishment of Sino-Philippine diplomatic ties in 1975.²³ Soon thereafter the CPP stopped

emphasizing Maoist-style armed struggle and increasingly followed a Soviet political line. In the closing days of the Marcos government, rather than capitalizing on weakness to further the CPP's aims, Chinese propaganda tended to play down the chaos in the Philippines while mildly supporting Aquino's political program. Chinese President Li Xiannian was the first foreign leader to congratulate Aquino on her assumption of office.²⁴ There has thus been little question for more than a decade that Beijing's ideological support is currently dedicated to a strong Philippine government and continued U.S. presence, with the communist insurgency there getting short shrift.

The Soviets appear to have hedged their bets by not completely ignoring ties with the CPP on the private level but publicly pursuing good ties with the incumbent Philippine Government.²⁵ Official Soviet party ties have continued to be with the legalized PKP rather than with the CPP. After relations were established in 1976, Moscow pursued good relations with the Marcos government and the expansion of trade and cultural ties.²⁶ In Marcos' darkest days immediately following the stormy February 1986 election, the Soviet Union was the first and only government formally to congratulate Marcos on his reelection. This was done on 19 February when the new Soviet ambassador presented his credentials.²⁷ Moscow just as readily switched its support to the Aquino government as evidenced in a 1 March congratulatory message sent to Aquino by the USSR Supreme Soviet.²⁸ The CPP has not sought Soviet

ideological support as it apparently tried to do in its formative years from China. Publicly the party denounces the CPSU as a social-imperialist party with nothing to contribute to the Philippine situation. In the Manila DAILY INQUIRER in early 1986, CPP leader Antonio Zume! claimed that Moscow reciprocated by leveling "vicious criticisms" against the CPP in party forums.²⁹

External Material Support

There is evidence the CPP receives several hundreds of thousands of dollars annually from leftists in Western Europe and the United States³⁰ -- enough to underwrite about 80 percent of its agitation and propaganda program.³¹ However, the United States is primarily concerned that China and the Soviet Union -- the major communist states -- could translate material aid into significant control of the insurgency.

There is no evidence and very little likelihood that Beijing has provided any material support to the CPP since before Sino-Philippine relations were established in 1975. If anything, China's support for the central government expanded when Aquino came to power in 1986. Within a month a Chinese trade delegation had arrived in Manila to renew an agreement under which Chinese oil was sold to the Philippines at favorable prices. To mark this visit, Chinese Ambassador Chen Conglu said that "the local Chinese community here [in Manila], who are mostly concerned with economic conditions, are eager to do their

share to strengthen the Philippine economy upon which they as businessmen are dependent."³²

In contrast, although Moscow has also pursued good relations with both the Marcos and Aquino governments, there is evidence it has provided some material support to the CPP while continuing officially to support the PKP. By the late 1970's the CPP was apparently prepared to seek, and the Soviets were apparently prepared to provide, substantive material aid. A Soviet defector, Stanislav Levchenko, a former KGB operative in Tokyo, in testimony before a U.S. Congressional committee in July 1982 claimed that in 1979 he had witnessed a money transfer from the KGB to a CPP messenger in Tokyo.³³ Also, in court captured National Democratic Front leader Horatio Boy Morales claimed that CPP Chairman Rodolfo Salas decided to seek aid from Moscow in 1979. An operation was therefore established to smuggle Soviet-manufactured AK-47's and Makharov pistols from Eastern Europe into the Philippines through South Yemen via a PLO faction.³⁴ No evidence has appeared, however, to indicate this pipeline was used more than once. Additional ties between the Soviets and the CPP were revealed in 1983, when Karl Gasper, an anthropologist and lay church worker living in the Philippines, was exposed as the link in a complex Soviet-sponsored international funding system to support the CPP.³⁵

PROSPECTS FOR EXTERNAL CONTROL OVER THE CPP

The Philippine communist insurgency -- both in its original 1930's manifestation under the PKP and the Huks and in its new form as the CPP and NPA -- has exhibited a great deal of ideological independence. Although there was limited help and influence from both Moscow and Beijing in their formative periods, both the PKP and the CPP felt free enough to pick and choose ideological allegiance almost at will and reworked ideology to serve indigenous needs. There is thus little evidence to suggest the Philippine insurgency would willingly subject itself to the rigid ideological control of either the Soviets or the Chinese should it come to power.

However, there is little question the insurgency has reached a stage where it requires external material support. Between 1980 and 1985 the NPA grew at an annual rate of 20 percent.³⁶ By the time Marcos fell in 1986, the noncommunist world was pointing with alarm at the phenomenal success of the reemergent insurgency. However, this very success faced the insurgency with a shortage of resources that prevented the NPA from forming permanent battalion-sized units and prompted the CPP to start looking actively for external support.³⁷ The CPP and NPA leaders have openly admitted difficulties in securing sufficient weapons and ammunition.³⁸ To enter a new phase of combat the NPA also requires heavier weapons. In statements CPP and NPA leaders have further conceded a shortage of food and

medicine and acknowledged that the "mass bases" -- the populace -- are poor and cannot fully supply the insurgency.³⁹

The accession to power of the populist Aquino government has, if anything, exacerbated the CPP's problem of developing and maintaining internal support and limited the options it enjoyed while the Marcos government was disintegrating. Whatever leverage the CPP might have established over the Aquino government was lost when it failed to actively support her candidacy and to cooperate at least superficially with her attempts to reach an accommodation between the government and the insurgency.

If it is going to expand -- indeed, even if it only intends to maintain its present position -- the insurgency clearly is going to need to develop outside support. There is evidence that since 1981 the CPP has realized this need and has welcomed support. Conditions under the Aquino government would indicate the CPP will increase rather than decrease its search for material aid, with the Chinese and Soviets being the most likely sources of significant support. However, it doesn't appear that either Beijing or Moscow are currently providing the insurgents with significant material aid. The Chinese, certainly, have clearly chosen to back a strong central government and favor the continued forward deployment of U.S. forces at the Clark and Subic Bay bases to counter the Soviets. In pursuance of this policy Beijing is unlikely to provide support in any form to the insurgents. The Soviets are playing

a more complex game. They have maintained links with both the PKP and CPP and have been providing limited material, if not ideological, support for the current insurgency. It is very difficult to determine the extent of this support. The few reports of aid serve more to highlight the limited level and nature of current support rather than prove meaningful Soviet involvement with the insurgents. Moscow has courted both the Marcos and Aquino governments almost as much as Beijing has. Such support as it does provide to the insurgency appears more to serve the interest of covering all of its bets than to actively promote the fall of Aquino and the empowerment of the CPP.

There are, however, 7,000 islands in the Philippine archipelago where arms shipments can be received in secret, and the communists have proven to be quite resilient and resourceful. Therefore, the possibility always exists that the CPP will be able to establish external aid -- more likely than not with Soviet involvement -- that will enable the insurgency to develop. The Aquino government is still quite shaky. To the extent the United States has not developed an acceptable alternative that would preserve our position and interests in the area, the insurgency cannot be ruled out as an alarming presence.

The Philippine insurgency's history of independence and self-sufficiency along with Beijing and Moscow's lack of real commitment indicate the question of external communist control

through either ideological or material support should not be the primary source of U.S. concern. Even without meaningful external support the movement has shown that it can significantly affect Philippine stability -- which is so delicate for the foreseeable future that this threat must be taken seriously. Whether the CPP gains power or influence or just is able to continue its current subversive political and military operations, it exists as a major source of anti-American sentiment and threat to continued U.S. presence in the Philippines. The insurgency thus deserves continued close scrutiny and counter operations.

ENDNOTES

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⁴L. Tarlac, He Who Rides the Tiger (New York: A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), pp. 17, 33.

⁵David A. Rosenberg, "Communism in the Philippines," Problems of Communism, Vol. XXXIII, No. 5 (September/October 1984), p. 32.

⁶Ibid., p. 34.

⁷Larry A. Nicksch, "The Communist Party of the Philippines and the Aquino Government: Responding to the 'New Situation'," in Carl H. Lande, ed., Rebuilding A Nation: Philippine Challenges and American Policy (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute Press, 1987), pp. 400-401.

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⁹Manila Business Day, 26 December 1985, p. 1.

¹⁰Larry A. Nicksch, op. cit., p. 399.

¹¹Transmission of Hong Kong AFP in English at 1557 GMT on 18 March 1986, printed in the FBIS Asia and Pacific Daily Report, 19 March 1986, p. 24.

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¹³Guy Sacerdoti and Philip Bowring, "Marx, Mao and Marcos," Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 130 (21 November 1985), p. 53.

¹⁴Larry A. Niksch, op. cit., p. 402.

¹⁵Ibid.

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¹⁷Broadcast of the Manila Far East Broadcasting Company in English at 2300 GMT on 27 December 1985, printed in the FBIS Asia and Pacific Daily Report, 6 January 1986.

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¹⁹Washington Post, 28 February 1986, p. A21a.

²⁰Washington Post, 23 March 1987, p. A13d.

²¹David Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 35.

²²Leif Rosenberger, "Philippine Communism: The Continuing Threat and the Aquino Challenge," in Lawrence E. Grinter and Young Whan Kihl, East Asia Conflict Zones: Prospects for Regional Stability and Deescalation (New York: St. Martins Press, 1987), p. 181.

²³David Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 35.

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²⁶David Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁷Broadcast of the Quezon City Maharlika Broadcasting System in English at 1000 GMT on 19 February 1986, printed in the FBIS Asia and Pacific Daily Report, 20 February 1986.

²⁸Moscow Izvestiya in Russian on 1 March 1986, p. 1, as published in English in the FBIS Soviet Daily Report, 3 March 1986.

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³⁰Larry A. Nicksch, op. cit., p. 400.

³¹Leif Rosenberger, "Philippine Communism: The Continuing Threat and the Aquino Challenge," op. cit., pp. 186-187.

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³⁴Ross Munro, "The New Khmer Rouge," Commentary, (December 1985), p. 36.

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³⁶Guy Sacerdoti and Philip Bowring, op. cit., p. 53.

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